

# ACES Student Connection



## LOOK FOR US!

### AT ACES

We are in Nashville and can't wait to connect! We hope to see you at :

Thursday: ACES Grad Student Meeting--4:30-5:20, Magnolia Boardroom

Friday: Grad Student Luncheon--12:00--1:20, Old Hickory Steak House

### AT ACA

ACA promises to be a great event, March 21-25, 2012. Join ACES grad students as we co-host a fabulous party with AMCD, grab some coffee at the ACES grad student coffee break, or simply stop by our booth in the expo center!

### ON FACEBOOK

Everyone is on Facebook, even ACES! Like us and keep up-to-date on ACES happenings.

Facebook Page: ACES Student Connection or <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=152550974774868>

### ON THE WEB

<http://acesonline.net/>

## Leading the Leaders, Helping the Helpers, Shaping the Future...

**A** CES conference theme inspires our first-ever graduate student newsletter. We asked ACES graduate student leaders to write about what and who inspires their leadership.

*From ACES President*

*Dr. Gerard Lawson, Virginia Tech*

I've been asked to share a few thoughts on how to get involved in ACES as an active member, and hopefully as a future leader of our association. Across the years that I have been involved with ACES at the state, regional or national level, I have frequently received emails and phone calls from students who want to be more involved with ACES. Those contacts get us energized and hopeful about the future of the profession. My first question is always, "What is your area of interest?" and you would be amazed at how often that stumps people. ACES at almost every level has Committees and Interest Networks that do a large part of the work, both in terms of governance (running the organization) and service (scholarly and practical contributions). Interest Networks are a great way to get involved, and to see a practical application as a result of your efforts. Similarly, we love having Graduate Students' perspectives on Committees, which inform the governance work of the association. In either case, the key to finding a good fit is knowing the answer to "What is your area of interest?" As with many things in your world (e.g.

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*From ACES Grad Faculty Liaison*

*Dr. Sejal Mehta, University of Central Florida*

When I think of the greatest leaders of our time, the first names that come to mind are Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and Franklin D. Roosevelt. This short list is by no means exhaustive, rather are just some of the renowned leaders that are known throughout the world for their impact on society. When I think of what these leaders have in common, the answer is simple. They did not take courses in leadership and learning how to have people follow them, rather they lived their life with passion, authenticity and did not take no for an answer. I believe leaders are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Leaders are people that follow their heart, not thinking about all of the obstacles they must overcome or reasons they should quit, rather focusing on their ability to make

*See Mehta, page 3*

*From ACES Grad Student Rep Designee:*

*Jennifer M. Cook, Virginia Tech*

Most of my family would tell you I was an "independent" child. What they would mean by "independent," is strong-willed, stubbornly autonomous, and single-minded in terms of doing everything myself. Since I am an only child, these traits may not

*See Cook, page 3*

dissertation) you are more likely to be invested in and successful with a project if you have interest, or better yet, passion for that area. "Where does your passion lead you?" Becoming active is step one, but ACES relies on active members who are willing to serve the organization with their time, talent, and energy. Claiming your passion means making a commitment to help us all get better at the work counselor educators and supervisors do. For example, in recent years, ACES has developed and published Clinical Supervision Competencies and Research Competencies for the Counseling Profession. That was work done by taskforce members who found an area that was an interest of theirs, invested their passion in that area, and developed a product to share that all counselors can benefit from. And that is the last piece of the process, from my perspective. Once you are active, involved, and contributing, you need to share what you know. Finding your voice is a phrase that is familiar for many counselors as we encourage our clients to speak their mind, say what they believe, express their feelings, etc. But too many talented counselors and counselor educators do not follow their own advice. The process of taking a stand or making a contribution can be risky. But when counselors take those risks, find and use their voice, everyone benefits. Those who are willing to serve often find opportunities to become leaders as well, and here is the worst kept secret in ACES; We want you to be the next leaders of the association. We have talented people in leadership roles across the association, and we want to keep nurturing members who have energy and new perspectives to contribute as well.

The one odd thing about this, even as I write it, is that active membership and especially leadership is often invitational, by which I mean that someone usually reaches out to us and says, "Can you help us in this effort? I believe you would be good at it." So here is your invitation. Please know that ACES is your professional home, and we are counting on you to become active, get involved, and prepare to lead.

Know your Self, Follow Your Passion, and Find Your Voice. Can you help ACES? I believe you would be good at it.

*Tamekia Bell, Old Dominion University*

When I was growing up, I wanted to be an entertainment lawyer and professional ballet dancer. It is amazing how life takes you in a completely different direction. I never thought I would be where I am today: a counselor and future counselor educator. It all started in college when I took a psychology of marriage course. This class changed my career plans forever.

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, I encountered many experiences that provided me the opportunity to self-reflect on my decision to enter the profession and provide counseling services to clients. One of the most instrumental experiences involved my master's practicum and internship at a psychiatric hospital. I was a nervous wreck entering this facility! I was unsure what to expect. I heard many horror stories and was definitely intimidated by the idea of providing counseling services solo.

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*Jodi L. Bartley, Plymouth State University*

My journey to leadership has been peppered with rich opportunities around every corner. While I have held leadership positions in other organizations in the past, the move toward becoming a leader in counselor education is new. In fact, the decision to enter into the field of counseling itself is still a rather new phenomenon! After obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Education, a Master's degree in Educational Psychology, and teaching for four years, it seemed not only risky, but somewhat irrational to switch career tracks and begin another Master's degree in Mental Health Counseling. However, from the minute I entered my first course, I knew the counseling profession – with its purely altruistic spirit and soft emotional undertones – was the perfect fit for me.

While I would like to write that my foray into leadership positions arose from some unknown potential, in reality, it simply seemed to arise from my passion for the field and my willingness to become involved. I started involving myself by taking an active interest in my mentors. For awhile, I felt a bit like a child – asking countless questions about everything associated with counseling and counselor education. One of my mentors strongly encouraged me (and all of her students) to serve in professional associations. I remember her saying, "As members of the field, it is part of our duty to serve the profession at large." After this statement, I began assuming various roles in professional organizations, attending and presenting at national conferences, and involving myself in key discussions in the field.

With an increased willingness to involve myself in every aspect of the profession and a fierce passion for everything in the field, I was soon asked to serve in leadership positions. While I would love to say that I was a born leader and assumed these positions with comfort and ease, the truth is, I often question my leadership skills and abilities. I remember sitting down with one of my mentors one day and admitting to her that I didn't really believe that I was a leader. She challenged me to question my definition of leadership, and she reiterated the importance of relying on my passion for and commitment to the field. Her words of wisdom have carried me through many moments of discouragement and self-doubt.

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*Rebecca E. Michel, Old Dominion University*

Throughout my educational and professional experiences I have been fortunate to connect with supportive and inspirational mentors who have encouraged my growth and development. These individuals celebrated my strengths, challenged my limitations and recognized my potential as a leader. The lessons I continue to learn from these counselor educators have helped me develop into the professional counselor I am today.

Numerous faculty members invested in my personal and professional development during my masters program at Bradley University and doctoral program at Old Dominion University. At the beginning of each program, I set up meetings with faculty members to speak with them about their research agendas, clinical interests, and leadership involvement. Often these meetings led to opportunities to serve as a research or teaching assistant or gain additional service experience. I found faculty members to be incredibly willing to invest time and energy in my development if I reached out to them for support and guidance from the beginning.

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*Cook cont. from page 1*

come as a huge surprise! I cannot necessarily say these personal qualities completely worked for me but for the first two-thirds of my life, I "got by" utilizing them.

Some time during my early to mid-twenties, I began to notice that peoples' view of me did not exactly match how I felt inside. Folks perceived me as strong, confident, directed, and unscathed by criticism. Inside, I felt weak, directionless, worthless, and criticized, which resulted in depression and isolation. I discovered that my independence and strong-willed nature had become huge liabilities because I did not allow people or experiences to positively shape my mind, heart, and soul; I made absolute certain that no one got "in."

Through a circuitous course of events, I decided to pursue a degree in counseling. One of the schools I applied to required an intensive, half-day interview for admission. At the end of the interview process, all of the applicants were brought together and one of the faculty members spoke to us. I clearly remember her state, "Some of you won't have the personal qualities we are looking for in a counselor and you will not be accepted." My mind immediately began to reel—and I felt like her gaze was fixed on me.

After the interview, I talked to one of my close friends and asked her what this statement could have meant with regard to me. She finally stated what I had thought for quite some time. She told me, "You are a gifted person with an amazing heart. You just don't let people help you be the best you can be and you stop short of greatness." I nodded, began to cry, and mumbled, "You're absolutely right."

I am forever indebted to my dear friend who spoke these difficult words to me. When I started my master's program in counseling, I committed that I would reach out, ask for help, and *really* let people into my life. I made myself available to every opportunity that could help me grow and to move in a new direction. None of this was particularly easy for me. When I would get overwhelmed or anxious, the young, "independent" child would throw a temper tantrum and try to bully me back to my old, strong-willed, and isolated ways. In the beginning, "little me" would often win but now, she gets little to no airtime.

Although it was difficult for me to make the commitment to allow others to shape my life, the benefits have far outweighed the relatively short period of discomfort I experienced. It is still sometimes scary to be "seen" and "known" by others but it also provides comfort, motivation, and stability when I think about, and reach out to, the host of people I have on my team. "Grateful" does not fully capture what my "team" means to me, particularly the person whom I call mentor and friend, who has unceasingly stood by me, especially through the process of application, acceptance, and initiation into doctoral work. I am still independent and tenacious but now they are assets, not liabilities. Don't let your *self* stop short of greatness.

*Mehta, cont. from page. 1*

a difference, one person at a time.

When I think of counselors and educators in the mental health field, I think of leaders. There are so many reasons why we should quit and stop fighting the battle of mental health, overcoming the many obstacles that always seem to get in our way. But we don't quit. Rather we wake up each morning and go to our respective places of employment, finding peace and purpose, knowing that we have the ability to make a difference, one person at a time. We are rarely well recognized or appreciated for the work that we do, and few people understand some of our greatest triumphs that we may accomplish. And so we are not driven by the plaques on our walls or the letters behind our names, instead we live our lives for the opportunity and privilege of serving others through our work. This to me is the essence of leadership.

As I think of my leadership development, I am reminded of the phrase "life is a journey, not a destination." I continue to learn more about myself each and every day, accepting my strengths and weaknesses as they all contribute to making me who I am. I strive to stay grounded in my purpose and meaning, remembering my humanity and the privilege I feel every time another client or student shares a piece of their story with me. I look to my mentors for their words of wisdom and insight they have as their share stories from their own journeys. And most importantly, I am reminded of some of the greatest leaders of our time and strive to live my life with passion, authenticity and believing in myself and ability to make a difference, one person at a time.

*Bartley, cont. from page 2*

In all of this, I will be the first to admit that I have a long way to go. However, my journey thus far has left me with a few pieces of wisdom that I carry with me. To anyone who is thinking of becoming a leader or involving him or herself more in the profession, I would offer the following:

- Become passionate about counseling and counselor education. It will fuel your work along the way.
- Read up on all the news in the field. Check out the websites of professional associations, sign up for listservs, and read monthly publications.
- Look for opportunities to become more involved and seize them.
- Seek out mentors that can help support and guide you throughout the process.
- Keep an open mind and be willing to learn from mistakes.
- And overall, enjoy what you do and be grateful for the opportunity to serve others. In my opinion, this in and of itself will sustain you along the journey.

*Bell, cont. from page 2*

Upon completion of my time there, I realized the people I worked with were just like everyone else. The only difference was that their coping mechanisms were no longer working for them and they needed additional help. This was such a huge realization for me. Once I made this realization, I was better able to connect with clients by becoming more empathic and genuine in my work with them.

My journey in a doctoral program has shaped me more than I ever expected. The experiences I have had teaching, supervising, presenting at conferences, providing counseling services, and taking classes helped me identify what is important to me as a counselor and future counselor educator. I envisioned this program helping me piece together all my experiences so that I can have a better understanding of professional identity and what it meant for me.

My professional and educational experiences had an impact on the development of my professional identity, however, not as major as the people who encouraged and mentored me throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies. I have been fortunate to have been mentored by individuals who modeled what I envision a counselor and counselor educator should be: dedicated, passionate, involved, advocating, and providing mentorship. The support and encouragement they provide me and the confidence they had in me helped shape my professional identity. With their mentorship, I became more confident in my ability to be an effective counselor and a future counselor educator. I credit many of my accomplishments to my mentors because they saw potential in me that I did not recognize in myself and I greatly appreciate them for that!

The ACES theme is very consistent with my experiences because my mentors and experiences have shaped me, and I want to make a difference in the lives of my clients and students as my mentors have made in my life. I will continue to "pay it forward" and I hope others will continue to follow suit.

*Michel, cont. from page 3*

During my masters program, faculty members welcomed my involvement in research projects and encouraged me to submit proposals for state and national conferences. As a first year student, I remember feeling excited and intimidated when I arrived at the ACA conference in Montreal, Canada. My supervisor had recommended I serve as a volunteer, which I found to be a great way to find a purpose and place within a large conference. During the conference I was amazed at the number of counseling specialties and innovative research practices presented. This early experience expanded my awareness of the counseling profession and the vast opportunities available for counselors. I came back to Bradley that year with a new perspective about the robust size of the counseling profession and my potential role in the field. Now, as a doctoral student, I have collaborated with numerous faculty members on research projects and conference presentations. These experiences have increased my ability to conceptualize and engage in meaningful research in order to add additional value to the vast counseling profession.

My mentors have demonstrated the importance of contributing to the counseling field through both scholarship and service. They lead by example with national and international professional involvement and encourage students to serve as leaders early in our careers. Locally, I have been actively involved in both the Beta Phi and Omega Delta chapters of Chi Sigma Iota as a student and alumni. While in leadership positions, I have had the privilege to work with two outstanding faculty advisors whose mentorship and wisdom continue to guide me to this day. Both women are genuine and sincere, with a great sense of humor and appreciation for life. As advisors, both have challenged me to stretch out of my comfort zone to enhance my counseling and research skills in order to become a more confident and effective counselor educator. All of my mentors have been instrumental in my growth as a helping professional. As a future college professor, I hope to live up to the high standards they set and instill passion in the next generation of counseling students.

### ACES Graduate Student Representatives

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